

Actual Monsters

We couldn't have been more than twelve, at the time. In fact, Charlotte was probably still eleven. But Isobel and I must have been twelve.

The youth club took place on a Friday night. Venue, local community centre, situated above the local supermarket.

Isobel's dad would give the three of us lifts, there and back. In my mind, this was too much. I, at least, lived ridiculously close, and could have walked *there* by myself, even if he'd insisted upon driving me back.

We weren't, in retrospect, mature for our ages. We were kids, and acted accordingly. So, maybe Mr. Tyler - Izzy's dad - was right, after all.

Izzy was even more overprotected than myself, which was saying something. Being diabetic, she always *was* viewed as somewhat vulnerable.

Beforehand, Mr. T. would chase us around the, almost empty, car park, pretending to be a monster. And we would be giggling and loving it, although I did have moments when I wondered whether anyone we knew might see us, and think we were totally crazy. On the whole, however, none of us minded. We were, as I said, kids.

Charlotte, predictably, headed straight for the pinball machine - and Isobel, the Space Invaders.

"I'll get the drinks in," I announced, having already gathered together enough change from each of my friends. In advance - knowing that, once immersed in their various games, I was unlikely to get much sense out of either girl.

Thanks, Jenny.

Don't mention it.

Evidently, neither of them were *planning* to.

By drinks, of course, I meant Shandy for Isobel, and Coke for Charlotte and myself. And more specifically, we're talking some cheap brand, that tasted vile. But what could you *do*? It was all they sold there. That - and Pink Shrimps, and White Mice.

About an hour had elapsed, and by this point, Charlotte had finally lost interest in pinball. Same couldn't be said for Izzy and her Space Invaders, but Charlotte and I had managed to drag her away, regardless.

A crowd of kids were gathered around - filling, and spilling from, a small, emerald room, in which resided a TV, VHS video recorder, and a few board games. And it wasn't the board games they were interested in.

"What's going on here?" asked Charlotte, addressing a girl, with blonde hair in bunches, whom we'd spoken to a few times - whose name I can't remember now, if I even knew it back then.

"You don't know?" The girl looked at my friend as if she'd grown an extra head or something.

"Know *what*?" A tone of definite irritation in her voice.

"They're showing the new Michael Jackson video," said the girl.
"'Thriller'."

So yes, *that's* how long ago it was, right? We're talking the release of "Thriller". It was huge.

In truth, although we crowded around with the rest, none of us actually saw much, if anything. And there was so much shoving, and competing for the best views.

It was after the crowd of kids finally dispersed that it happened: the panic, the yelling, the absolute chaos. The blood.

The stabbing.

We were sent home early that evening, and Mr. T. didn't need to "be a monster", on the car journey to our respective homes.

It was the beginning of the end of our innocence. Because, of course, Isobel, Charlotte, and I all had our fair share of traumatic events to come, over the years.

Izzy's dad didn't need to play monster games with us any more. Actual monsters existed. Beyond car parks, and youth clubs - beyond pinball, Space Invaders, and the "Thriller" music video.